

Maintaining Our Mental Health

11 LESSONS TO KEEP YOURSELF GROUNDED

Dr. Ryan Davis, Mind Health Institute



My name is **Dr. Ryan Davis**, and I'm a psychiatrist and a mental performance coach. Most of my work is with professional athletes—especially golfers—and with executives in high-stress, high-performance worlds. When I was invited to speak with you

at **NICA Marketplace**, I started thinking about your lives: *long hours, travel, pressure, and the need to stay sharp and “on” no matter what’s happening around you*. You are the people who make the magic happen behind the lights, the smells, and the sounds that so many families look forward to every year. When the lines are steady, the crew's clicking, the equipment behaves, and the rhythm just feels right—*life couldn’t be much sweeter*.

I realized—you have way more in common with *PGA Tour professionals* than most people might think. Both of you travel constantly, depend on your teams, perform under pressure, and operate in public in different locations. Both of you know that the perfect week isn't one where nothing goes wrong—it's the one where everything runs smoothly and you can manage the challenges you face head on. In my work with athletes, the first month is all about building awareness, grounding, and mental and physical habits, like a pre-season training camp for the mind. What follows are 11 lessons, adapted to your life on and off the Fairgrounds.

Lesson 1: The High-Adrenaline World

Let's start with the obvious—*your world runs hot*. You're on the move constantly, simultaneously dealing with weather, customers, staff, deadlines, noise, and movement—and there's almost never an “off” switch. It's high-adrenaline, high-output, and when it's going well—it's exhilarating. That high output is part of why so many of you love and stay in this profession.

But then comes the off-season, and suddenly things get quiet—*maybe too quiet*. That discomfort is what I call the adrenaline hangover: *your brain*

and body trying to reset after months in “go mode.” That's not weakness—that's wiring. Your body's trying to reset. Accept that doing nothing is doing something and schedule your reset days. Your mental system needs maintenance just as much as your equipment, your body, and your crew. When you take care of the Operator, everything else runs smoother.

Lesson 2: Pay Yourself First—With Time

The same way financial advisors say, “*Pay yourself first*,” I tell my athletes, and now you, to do the same with your time. If you don't intentionally carve out time for yourself at the start of your day or week, the world will spend it for you.

Ten quiet minutes in the morning. One small weekly ritual that belongs only to you. A boundary you protect. Even a lucky trinket you clasp to ground yourself.

Treat your time like your best inventory: limited, valuable, and worth protecting. When you pay yourself first, everything else—*patience, focus, relationships*—improves.

Lesson 3: The Mental Dashboard

Your mental health has a dashboard, and the warning lights are real:

- **Emotional:** irritability, numbness
- **Physical:** headaches, tension, poor sleep
- **Behavioral:** zoning out, drinking more
- **Social:** withdrawing, losing interest

Don't ignore those lights. And don't ignore them in others. Sometimes a simple, “*Hey, are you good?*” is exactly the check-in someone needs.

Lesson 4: Perfection vs. Strong Effort

Perfection is a moving target—and a dangerous one. It creates pressure and burnout. What I teach is this: *You're not aiming for perfect. You're aiming for consistent*. Consistency is freedom. Strong effort, repeated over time, will always outperform perfection.

Lesson 5: Staying Grounded on the Road

I work with athletes on creating anchors—*small, consistent actions that remind them who*

they are no matter where they are. Your anchors might include:

- Morning coffee
- Nighttime prayer or gratitude
- A consistent call home
- A walk around the grounds before gates open

Pair them with micro-recoveries throughout the day—a *breath*, a *laugh*, a *moment outside*. The goal isn't to avoid stress. **It's to recover faster.**

Lesson 6: A Healthy Body for a Healthy Mind

Your brain rides around in your body. If your body is worn down, your mind will struggle.

- Sleep is a secret weapon.
- Movement boosts mood and resilience.
- Hydration and nutrition make a bigger difference than people realize.

This isn't about perfection—just consistent, *intentional* care.

Lesson 7: The Power of Vocabulary

Words matter. Not just the ones we say out loud, but the ones we say internally. The language you use can change how you feel about your day:

- “*I need to*” feels heavy.
- “*I want to*” feels purposeful.
- “*I choose to*” feels empowered.

Small shifts change everything, because the story you tell yourself is the one you end up believing.

Lesson 8: Finding Rhythm at Home

When you come off the road, stillness can feel uncomfortable. That restlessness is your nervous system recalibrating.

- Don't call it “*doing nothing*.” Call it recovery.
- Do something non-productive on purpose.
- Refill the tank.

The goal is rhythm, not balance: *in-season, be all in; at home, be present*.

Lesson 9: Balance by Design, Not by Default

Real life doesn't divide into equal slices. Some weeks, work takes 90%. Other weeks, family or personal care must lead. The key is intentionality—*designing how your time is spent; not letting life decide for you*. Stress comes from imbalance

by accident. Satisfaction comes from balance by design.

Lesson 10: Purpose & SMART Goals

When we lose connection to our “*why*,” we fall into constant motion without progress—the *hedonic treadmill*. SMART goals bring direction and meaning:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

Purpose gives your energy a destination.

Lesson 11: Relationships & Perspective

Healthy relationships—whether it's your partner, kids, or coworkers—are the ultimate stabilizers. The idea that relationships should be 50/50 is a trap. Sometimes it's 99/1, and sometimes it's 30/70. What matters is long-term commitment, not momentary equality. We also tend to feel our own effort more than we see others'. Before assuming imbalance, pause and ask: “*Could they be giving in ways I'm not seeing?*” That shift builds empathy, trust, and stronger relationships.

Bringing It All Together

Everything I shared—*grounding, awareness, recovery, intentional balance, connection*—supports what I call mental performance culture. You already know how to keep your operations running smoothly. This is about keeping your people, including yourself, running smoothly too.

At the close of each coaching session, I give homework. Here's yours:

1. **Each month:** Check in with yourself. *What are your percentages and do you like them?*
2. **Each week:** Check in with someone else.
3. **Each day:** Do something that grounds you in your personal “*why*.”

Those little moments are how “*Together We Can!*” becomes more than a slogan—it becomes a way of living. When your mind's steady, your crew's connected, and your Fair is running smooth—that's success. Not just in sales, not just in numbers, but in life. You bring joy to thousands each year! Just make sure you're taking care of the people who make that happen, starting with yourself, and remember, “*Together We Can!*” ▲